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C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 000635

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KJUS](#) [PM](#)
SUBJECT: PANAMA: PRD CONFIRMS RODRIGUEZ CHOICE FOR NA
PRESIDENT

REF: PANAMA 00616

Classified By: Classified by A/POLCOUNS Eric Geelan for reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) The Democratic Revolutionary Party's (PRD) National Assembly (NA) caucus formally selected Raul Rodriguez on July 29 as their candidate to replace Pedro Miguel Gonzalez (PMG) as President of the National Assembly (see Reftel). The actual election will take place on September 1 when the NA reconvenes, but his victory is a virtual certainty. The selection of the relatively unknown Rodriguez is a sign that President Torrijos has reasserted his control over the NA caucus, after last year's election of PMG.

PMG To Be Replaced September 1

¶2. (U) The Democratic Revolutionary Party's (PRD) National Assembly (NA) caucus met July 29 and selected Raul Rodriguez as its candidate for President of the National Assembly. Given party discipline, and the PRD's majority in the NA, this decision means that Rodriguez will replace Pedro Miguel Gonzalez (PMG) as President of the National Assembly on September 1. Rodriguez will serve out the last year of this legislature's five-year term. Rodriguez is a first term Deputy.

¶3. (U) The caucus also selected first term Deputy Nelson Jackson, representing Colon, as its candidate for Vice President of the National Assembly, and first term Elizabeth de Quiroz as its candidate for Second Vice President.

¶4. (C) Third term Deputy Ruben De Leon was chosen as the PRD Majority Leader. Deputy De Leon has taken controversial positions on issues of interest to the USG in the past. He voted against the Corozal Cemetery Agreement in 2000, which authorized the continued existence of the U.S. military cemetery at Corozal, and against the agreement authorizing OPIC to work in Panama, also in 2000.

Comment

¶5. (C) The choice of these relatively unknown Deputies to direct the NA is an indication that President Torrijos has reasserted his power over the PRD caucus. Last year's

election of PMG embarrassed Torrijos and damaged the chances for passage of the TPA by the U.S. Congress. Torrijos has sent a clear message to the NA that he expects no surprises during his last year in power.

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